

The Wisconsin Guardian Mentor Program

Program Goals

- Provide an independent source of information, resources, and one- to-one support to help guardians of State Center residents understand and respond to changing policies regarding the long term placement of people with developmental disabilities.
- Provide a network of guardians that are available to the State Center guardians and assist them in understanding their rights and responsibilities as guardians. Also assist them in effectively serving as a guardian for someone living at a State Center.
- Ensure that guardians have the information and tools needed to actively participate in any planning or review process being conducted to determine the most appropriate long-term placement for their wards.

Program Background

- In March of 2003, federal funding was obtained to develop a program that would provide helpful resources and one-to-one assistance to State Center guardians.
- The program is specifically intended to assist guardians facing the prospect of being asked to consent to, or participate in, transition planning aimed at relocating someone from a State Center to a new living situation.
- The program is also intended to help guardians of people who have recently relocated from a State Center by helping them navigate and advocate within the community services system.

Who Are the Guardian Mentors?

- Guardian mentors are guardians who have been through the transitional process where the person they represented has moved from a State Center to another living environment.
 - Among the current pool of guardian mentors, there are individuals available who have experience transitioning people from Northern, Southern and Central Wisconsin Centers.
 - Most of the guardian mentors are family members.
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What is the Role of a Guardian Mentor

- Guardian Mentors provide information and personal one-to-one assistance and support to other guardians in order to help them more effectively prepare for, and carry out, their guardian responsibilities.
- Guardian Mentors provide information, unbiased decision-making assistance, and advocacy for guardians of individuals who are living in, or have moved out of, a State Center. Guardian Mentors do this by working in a one-on-one mentoring relationship with a guardian while maintaining confidentiality for the guardians and individuals they represent.
- Guardian Mentors are available to guide the guardian through the transition planning process, answer questions, provide accurate information about community services and supports, and act as advocates for the guardians they are mentoring.

What is the Role of a Guardian Mentor

- Guardian Mentors will identify what resources are available to guardians that can help the guardians to become more active in planning for and monitoring the quality of life of the person they represent.
- Guardian Mentors do not make decisions for the guardian, or act as the guardian. Guardian Mentors provide primary support for the guardian during decision making processes affecting the person the guardian represents.
- Where possible, Guardian Mentors recruit additional Guardian Mentors from the population of guardians who have experience with the State Center-to-community transition planning process. These guardian mentors will work with guardians of individuals still residing in a State Center.
- Where possible, Guardian Mentors also recruit community guardian mentors from the population of guardians with community services experience. These Guardian Mentors will work with guardians of individuals who have recently transitioned out of a State Center, and are now receiving community services.

Guardian Mentor Training

- Guardian Mentors receive orientation and training on the elements of being a guardian mentor, and on the scope of activities that are appropriate within the mentoring process. They also receive a manual that summarizes the mentoring process and the scope of activities.
- Guardian Mentors have access to a Program Coordinator, who can provide individual support and advice if Guardian Mentors have questions or concerns about particular situations. Guardian Mentors have the opportunity to talk with and consult each other, through conference calls or an email listing of Guardian Mentors.

Community Services

- State supported plans are placing increased emphasis on developing appropriate community living alternatives for people with developmental disabilities.
- Many individuals with developmental disabilities who are currently receiving care at a State Center are being evaluated to determine if relocation to a community living environment that can meet their needs is now possible.
- The need for the level of care provided at a State Center will not go away as many people have significant special needs requiring an extremely high level of care. Relocation evaluations must take these needs into consideration, and ensure that any alternative living arrangement provides the level of care that each person requires.
- The community service system is supporting many people who require 24 hour care, specialized behavioral and medical interventions, and constant supervision.
- The level of care provided by the State Centers used to only be available in the State Centers, but it is now increasingly available in the community.

Questions that Guardians of State Center Residents May Now Face

- How do you feel about the possibility of community placement at this time?
- Will you consent to allowing a transition plan to be developed?
- Do you want to visit some community residential living facilities where former State Center residents are now living?

Questions that Guardians may have about Community Placements

- Where will the person receive health and dental care?
- What will the person be doing during the day?
- How safe will the person be in the community setting with regard to the location of the home and staff support?
- If the person relocates, how can I make sure that community placement goals have been met, and will continue to be met?

Why We Encourage Guardians to Ask Questions About Community Placement

- Asking questions is a first step toward considering all options in determining the best living environment for a person.
- Some of the questions may be easily answered. Others will be more difficult to answer and may require judgement decisions made by the guardian.
- The Guardian Mentor Program is designed to help guardians with their questions, and also consider their options in an objective way.
- The Guardian Mentor Program can help people understand the transition planning process and what it means to give consent to allow the process to go forward, versus giving consent for someone to be relocated from a State Center.
- The Guardian Mentor Program can help guardians take a more active role in annual Watts reviews, transition planning, and other decision-making processes impacting the person they represent.

Today's Guardian Mentor Program

- Has a toll-free number and email address that guardian can use to get connected with a Guardian Mentor.
- The Guardian Mentor Program has already assisted guardians in the following ways:
 1. By providing information sessions and written materials to help guardians with the various questions they may have about their rights and responsibilities, and their role in determining their ward's living arrangements.
 2. By providing information regarding the range of residential placement options, how to compare options, how to choose placement goals, and how to establish outcomes that guardians can expect will be achieved.
 3. By being involved with arranging tours of various residential placement options.

Guardian Mentors Can Help Guardians To...

- Formulate questions that need to be answered before making a decision about a change in living arrangements.
- Gain access to written information on policies, programs, and residential services.
- Gain access to helpful resources that other groups and organizations may offer.
- Connect with other guardians in similar situations to understand what they are experiencing.
- Stay informed about various informational meetings that the guardian may wish to attend.

NOTE: The Wisconsin Guardian Mentor Program does NOT offer any legal advice, nor does it replace the role of case managers or county developmental disability services personnel.

Testimonials

- “When I called concerning my brother, I was pleased to talk to you, because it was obvious that you had a heart for people with special needs. Change is never easy, but you were such an encouragement. Moving my brother from Northern Center to a new setting will be a big step, but I am confident it will be a wise step.” -- Charlotte
- “Thank you for your excellent advice and assistance. The spring of 2003 seminar was very helpful in bolstering my confidence to go forward with community placement for my brother.”
-- Arlene

Program Contacts

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